



DAY #44: Conference

THE CENTRALITY OF THE HOLY MASS
IN THE LIFE OF ST. IGNATIUS &
ACCORDING TO VEN. FULTON SHEEN

For those taking this in Lent, on schedule, today is Holy Thursday, the day of the institution of the **Eucharist** (*This is my body which is given for you, This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood*, Lk 19b, 20), the institution of the **Catholic Priesthood** (*Do this in remembrance of me*, Lk 22:19b), and the giving of the **New Commandment of Charity** (*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*”, Jn 13:34-35). And so today, we will consider the place where this occurred, the Last Supper, the first Holy Mass.

This conference has two main sections: first we will consider the importance of the Eucharist in the life of St. Ignatius¹ and secondly how we can better participate in it, following some wise teaching of Venerable Fulton Sheen. As always, let us begin with prayer:

Hail Mary...Glory Be...

THE HOLY MASS ACCORDING TO ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

"The Church draws her life from the Eucharist," these words, with which Pope St. John Paul II begins the encyclical that bears precisely that name (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*), are a great truth today and always have been, because to say that the Church lives from the Eucharist is nothing other than to say that she lives from Jesus, who, lest we ever doubt this, told us, *"Apart from me you can do nothing."* (Jn 15:5) And while this is an indisputable truth for the whole Church, it is fulfilled to an even greater degree in the saints, who, having a very intense supernatural life, need to nourish it all the more, so that it may continue to strengthen and grow.

Even so, there are some saints who have stood out for their Eucharistic piety; saints such that no sooner does one think of them, than one thinks of the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist – before which they spent hours and hours, and invited others to do the same –, or of the Holy Mass which they celebrated or participated in in an uncommon way (in its "elevation") for us.

For example, if one thinks of **St. Manuel González**, one relates him to **"the abandoned Tabernacles"**... if we think of **Padre Pio**, it is difficult to avoid an image of him celebrating Holy Mass coming to mind, Masses that lasted 3 hours. And so with other aspects of spirituality or with

¹ This is translated from a conference by Fr. Gustavo Lombardo, IVE in 2023, called *Centralidad De La Santa Misa En La De San Ignacio*. It can be found in its entirety [here](#). The citations can also be found there with the corresponding numbers.

other sacraments: How to think, for example, of the **Holy Curé of Ars** (St. John Vianney) without imagining him for hours in the confessional?

When we think of St. Ignatius, if we know something about him, it is not difficult to relate him to the *Spiritual Exercises*, or to see him as a **founder**, or, perhaps also, as a **missionary** (for having sent so many of his sons to distant lands), but it is not so easy to imagine him in relation to the Eucharist. And what we will try to show in this talk is precisely this: that his **relationship with the Eucharist** was such and was of such importance for the life of the Church, that we should easily be able to relate St. Ignatius – when we remember him – to this **Great Sacrament**.

"And so, being in this town in the church of the said monastery hearing Mass one day, and at the elevation of the Corpus Domini, he saw with interior eyes some like white rays coming from above; and although after so much time he cannot well explain this, still what he saw with understanding clearly was to see how Jesus Christ our Lord was in that Most Blessed Sacrament." (Autobiography)

HOLY COMMUNION (ENCOURAGING BETTER RECEPTION OF EUCHARIST)

It is certain that in the 16th century few did as much as he to spread among the Christian people love for the Sacrament. We know that wherever he went, he always sought *"to help souls"* – as he used to say – and he did so, and with much fruit, mainly through the Exercises. In them, as we have seen when speaking of frequent confession, to those who did not have much capacity or intention of progressing in spiritual life, he **recommended receiving the Most Blessed Sacrament every eight days**[5], that is, much more frequently than was customary in those times. And, I repeat, this was for the **less fervent**.

It is known that in ancient times it was customary to receive Holy Communion annually; in the times of our Saint, it was extremely rare for religious communities to receive Communion more than six or seven times a year. But what is striking is what St. Ignatius relates in a letter to his countrymen of Azpeitia – where the present-day Loyola neighborhood is located – where, while recommending frequent Communion, he points out to them that the fact that it is not done in that manner is due to the lack of devotion of the Christian people; thus he expresses it, speaking of past times:

"All men and women of age to receive took the Most Blessed Sacrament every day; after a short time, devotion beginning to cool a little, they all received Communion every eight days; later, after a long time, cooling much more in true charity, they came to receive Communion all on the three main feasts of the year, leaving each one in his freedom and in his devotion, if he wished to receive more often, whether every three days, or every eight days, or every month; and finally, we have stopped at once a year, due to our so much coldness and weakness, that it seems the name remains for us to be Christians, as you will see in the greater part of the whole world, if with a quiet and holy mind you wish to contemplate it."[6]

And it is with these words that he invites them to return to their first love, making confessions and Communions more frequent:

"Let it be for us, for the love and spirit of such a Lord, and such great profit for our souls, to renew and refresh in some way the holy customs of our forefathers; and if we cannot in all, at least in part, confessing and communicating, as I said above, once a month. And whoever wishes to go

Fr. Justo Beguiritzáin in his book titled *St. Ignatius of Loyola, Apostle of Frequent Communion* relates:

So new was it at that time to receive Communion more than once a year, without danger of death, that if someone wanted to receive more often, to avoid murmurings, they would go to receive Communion in the hermitages of the countryside; because this caused no less admiration than if they had seen an ox fly.[7]

And in a footnote, he adds:

The same is confirmed by Fr. Alcázar, S.J., with these words: "Ignatius and his companions used to receive Communion every eight days, and they advised the same to others: a thing so extraordinary for that century, that it was a motive for common murmuring; some calling it irreverent audacity, and others hypocritical extravagance: and they found themselves forced, to avoid the reproach, to go changing churches, and to avail themselves of the hermitages of the countryside." [8]

THE HOLY MASS IN THE LIFE OF ST. IGNATIUS [9²]

A typical note of St. Ignatius's mysticism, rightly noted by all who have studied his spirituality, is that it is an essentially Eucharistic and liturgical mysticism, centered on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. **The daily Mass is the center of all graces.** And even those he receives during the day almost always appear as the prolongation and complement of those of the morning. Dr. Suquía, who has analyzed this liturgical aspect with great diligence, goes so far as to affirm: *"It seems to me that Íñigo de Loyola joins the choir of holy priests who, like St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Vincent de Paul, the holy Curé of Ars, made their **daily Mass** the sole center of all their spirituality."*

From the beginning

Without dwelling on Ignatius before his conversion, we will only say that the religious atmosphere that surrounded his early childhood was such that, alongside serious moral blemishes, peasants and artisans were permitted to go to Mass, very early in the morning, every day.

It is likely that already, after his conversion at Loyola, as soon as his health permitted, St. Ignatius participated in Mass daily; for as a family they were patrons of a church where it was celebrated every day.

The vigil of arms at Montserrat... can one conceive of an entire night of Ignatius, after such a diligent confession for a better preparation for Communion, without a good part of it being spent in contemplation of the Eucharistic mystery?

Holy Mass, in the divine communications of Manresa. Ignatius had an unparalleled master in Manresa: **God**. More than books, He taught him **directly**, immediately. In those divine, sovereign lessons, during almost a year, would the Sacrifice of the Mass never be spoken of between Master and disciple? *"In almost all the mysteries of faith he was especially enlightened and consoled by the Lord,"* says Father Lainez. *"At this time, guided by Our Lord, he began to work on the interior of his soul,"* says Father Nadal, *"giving him... very vivid feelings of the divine mysteries and of the Church."*

These two testimonies alone, keeping in mind what the Mass was, from Manresa onward, in Ignatius of Loyola, would suffice to think that the great illuminations of Manresa also extended to the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist.

² 9 We freely follow: Á. SUQUÍA GOICOECHEA, *La Santa Misa en la espiritualidad de San Ignacio de Loyola*, Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales, Madrid 1950. This work was distinguished with the gold medal of H.H. Pope Pius XII, at the Gregorian University of Rome.

It is clear that this intellectual vision refers to the Eucharist, and that from it, as from its principle, springs the eminently Eucharistic spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola. But if one observes that it was "hearing Mass," at the elevation of the Corpus Domini – the crucial moment of the Holy Sacrifice –, when he saw clearly **how Jesus Christ our Lord was in that most holy Sacrament, one cannot fail to point out the sacrificial aspect of the illumination:** Ignatius saw clearly how, at the time of the sacrifice, Jesus Christ, Priest and victim, immortal and invisible, is sacrificing Himself on the altar, through the hands of His visible priest, and understood, at the same time as the infinite value of Christ's sacrifice, the purity and reverence necessary in those who had to "handle Him, hold Him in their hands, receive Him."

Within the conclusions expressed by Dr. Suquía in the first part of the book, where he treats Eucharistic spirituality in the times of St. Ignatius, he affirms:

"The Mass is the central act of Christian worship, and, as such, it responds to all the demands, divine and human, of the present economy of grace. Man, soul and body, owes God an integral worship, interior and exterior, from the deepest of the soul, in spirit and truth, to the sensible, of words and gestures, which his very sensitive nature demands."

The Mass, within St. Ignatius's spirituality, has some peculiar, very personal, unmistakable traits; it would be absurd to try to explain them solely by the attachments of the environment in which he lived.

Holy Mass, center of the personal spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola

(1) *First step of the process: the **priesthood** appears as the center of St. Ignatius's spiritual personality.*

Perhaps because it is too **obvious**, this personal nuance of **St. Ignatius as a priest** is overlooked. Nevertheless, it holds extraordinary interest for whoever wants to penetrate his spirit. Already from Manresa he looks to the priesthood, at least as a possible goal. And once he discerned the spiritual movements, he would have lived it with much intensity.

The great consolation he experienced on the day of his ordination was the fruit of a long preparation, doctrinal and spiritual, under an uninterrupted rain of graces that sank deep into the mortified, silent earth of passions in disorder of his soul: "**we prepared for the priesthood**, for which we were ordained on the day of St. John the Baptist, with much consolation for us and also for the bishop of Arvense, who, without receiving from us a single coin, nor a candle, ordained us; and said that in his life he had never made such an ordination with so much satisfaction for himself."

Newly ordained he writes in a letter: "*all this I have brought... to manifest our greater burden and confusion, if we do not help ourselves where so much Our Lord helps us, that without asking or knowing it seems that all things and means desired by us come to our hands.*"

St. Ignatius, from then on, **made the priesthood the center of his entire life**; in that power that had been given to him to celebrate the ecclesiastical offices, administer the Sacraments, preach the gospel of Christ, he finds all the powerful spring of the dynamism of his interior life. **Very little remains in him of the gentleman:** the idea of a disinterested, faithful service, for love of Jesus Christ, and nothing more; it is the priesthood that invades, like a flood of life, all his activities, the celebration of the divine mysteries, the preaching of the divine word, the administration of the Sacraments. He who does not look at his whole life from his priesthood will remain on the surface of St. Ignatius's spirit.



The Priesthood and the Sacrifice are inseparable in themselves; the saint of the Spiritual Exercises, far from weakening the happy bond of these realities, strengthened and confirmed it in his life."

(2) *Second step of the process: the **Holy Mass**, center of the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola.*

(3) *Third step of the process. In the personal spirituality of St. Ignatius, the Mass is not only the center of the graces he receives throughout the day, but of his entire system of spiritual life and especially due to its **sacrificial** aspect.*

Next to each altar, as she was next to the cross, is the **Mother of the Crucified**. She, who according to St. Alphonsus, **suffered on Calvary the equivalent of a thousand deaths**; She, who according to the same saint, became to such an extent one victim with her Son that they were not two sacrifices, but one only; She, who as our Mother knows our weaknesses and reticence before personal sacrifice. She, then, be our great example, our great teacher and companion in each Holy Mass; She teaches us to die with and for her Son; She presents to Him and with Him to the Father, in the Holy Spirit, our very poor offering, which delivered by her hands will cease to be so poor.

May she be in our heart when we receive Communion... and may she always be whom we invoke before the sacramental Presence of her Son...

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Now, let us follow the words of the Venerable (soon to be Blessed) Fulton Sheen, on the Mass. In short, he argues that we complain we 'get so little out of the Mass', because we don't bring anything to it. In this short talk, let us consider how we can better participate in the Holy Mass.

THE MEANING OF THE MASS

By Ven. Fulton Sheen

Original talk: [here](#) (youtube)

I'm going to talk to you today about the Mass and try to make it clear to you, if I can. I'm sure there are some young people here in this church who have said, "Oh, I don't want to go to Mass. I don't want to go to church. I don't get anything out of it." Do you know the reason why? Because you don't bring anything to it.

Now, some of you boys, for example, I am sure have mothers who are not the least bit interested in football. You say, "Come look at this game—it's wonderful." She gets nothing out of it. Why? Because she doesn't bring any knowledge of football to it. Think of how many people would not go to an opera—they would find it boring. That's because they bring no knowledge of music to it.

Just suppose that you were suddenly put down in Athens on the Hill of the Areopagus. Would you understand it? Would you think, "Oh, this is where Socrates defended himself, and this is where St. Paul gave that great discourse to the senators of Athens"? You'd have to bring something to Greece in order to understand it. And so certainly you'll get nothing out of the Mass if you've made no sacrifice, no effort, to understand what the Mass is.

Very simply, what the Mass is, is reaching to Calvary and laying hold, with your hand, of the Cross of Christ—with Christ on it—and you plant it down here today. Whenever a Mass is celebrated, we take



the Cross we planted down in Nairobi, we plant it down in Tokyo, we plant it in New York, we plant it in this city. That's what the Mass is: the **continuation of Calvary**.

In order to take part in it, you have to bring little crosses. Our Blessed Lord said, "*Take up your cross daily and follow Me.*" Everyone has a cross. For example, if you're young students, you've got the cross of spelling, of mathematics, of obedience. When mother says, "Do the dishes," that's a little cross. Older people have different kinds of crosses. We bring all of our crosses here and plant them down alongside that great Cross of Christ, and we mash them all together under Him. That is the Mass.

It has **three acts**. It's like a great **drama**. Suppose that four or five centuries before Christ—during the great age of drama—a drama was presented that moved hearts and purged souls, which wise old Greeks said was the purpose of drama anyway. But it was played only once. If you were at that theater and your soul was better because you witnessed the drama, you would say, "What a pity—everyone in the world should see this." How could that be done? By establishing road companies: new actors, same lines, same drama, but appearing on different stages of the world.

Apply this now to the death of Our Lord. This drama was played once. But on the night of the Last Supper, Our Blessed Lord said, "I am going to prepare this drama so that it will be reenacted all over the world, and hearts will be purified and souls purged." So He established road companies. As He said to His apostles and His priests: "Do this. Repeat it." Same lines, same purpose—only the stages are different.

We will now follow the three acts of the drama.

Act One: you *offer* yourself to Christ.

Act Two: you *die*—you die *with Him*.

Act Three: because you died with Him, now you get **new life**.

Act One is the **Offertory**. Act Two is your death with Christ—the **Consecration**. Act Three, rising to a new life, is **Holy Communion**.

Now follow me through these three acts.

ACT ONE: THE OFFERTORY

You offer yourself. You bring yourself to Christ and say, "I want to be one with You in Your great act of redemption."

When the Mass begins, the Lord looks out from Heaven and says, "I can't die again in this nature I took from Mary; this nature is glorified. But Peter, Paul, Mary, Ann—will you give Me your human nature? Offer yourself to Me, and I will die again in you, and let you pass through the same stages of life as I pass through."

How do you offer yourself to the Lord? Not just by being present, but by using symbols—bread and wine. When the bread and wine are brought to the altar, you are brought to the altar.

Why did Our Lord choose bread and wine? First, because no two substances better signify **unity**. Bread is made from a multiplicity of grains of wheat; wine from a multiplicity of grapes. So we who are many are one in mind and heart with Christ.



Furthermore, bread and wine are the substances that have most traditionally nourished mankind. When we bring that which gives us life, we are bringing ourselves. We are also bringing part of creation. We take elements out of creation and say to God, “These are going to be wholly Yours someday. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. Everything in creation will be totally subject to You. This is the first fruit of the total giving of creation to Christ.”

In the Offertory, therefore, you become present on the altar. You are on the paten; you are in the chalice under the form of bread and wine. That is your symbol.

One of the reasons the collection is taken up at the Offertory is that it is meant to be a symbol of your self-sacrifice. It buys the bread and wine and helps the sacrifice. That’s the end of Act One.

ACT TWO: THE CONSECRATION

Now we come to Act Two: you die. You are crucified.

We cannot live to Christ unless we die to our lower nature. Our Lord now represents His death at the Consecration—and you are with Him.

How is His death represented? How did Our Lord die on the Cross? **By the separation of blood from His body.** There were fountains of blood from His hands, His feet, and finally from His heart. He was practically drained of blood, and Scripture tells us that life is in the blood.

We reenact this death by the separate consecration of bread and wine. The priest does not say, “This is My Body and My Blood” together—that would signify life. Instead, first: “This is My Body,” and then over the wine: “This is My Blood.” That separation is a sacramental reenactment of Christ’s death.

But you are with Him. So you must die with Him—die to pride, lust, envy, gluttony, sloth, and avarice. At the moment of Consecration, there is also a secondary meaning to the words. When the priest says, “This is My Body. This is My Blood,” he is also saying interiorly: “This is myself. I give the totality of my being to You.” You should say the same. Your duties, responsibilities, and vocation remain, but what you are substantially—body, soul, intellect, will—you give entirely to Christ. That is the Consecration. You die with Christ.

ACT THREE: HOLY COMMUNION

Now we come to Communion, Act Three. No one ever dies with Christ without receiving new life. To understand Communion, look at nature in springtime. If sunlight, phosphates, and carbon in the earth could speak, they would say to the plants, “Unless you eat me, you shall not have life in you.” The plants would say to the animals, “Unless you eat me, you shall not have life in you.” Animals would say to us, “Unless you eat me, you shall not have life in you.”

And Christ says to us: “Unless you eat Me, you shall not have life in you.”

The law of transformation holds: chemicals become plants, plants become animals, animals become man—and man becomes Christ. We now have His life in us.



This higher life involves love: lover, beloved, and love. As in marriage, so in Communion. The union of our soul with Christ produces the ecstasy of divine love.

Communion also has another aspect: we must bear the death of Christ in our lives. We must constantly deny ourselves so that Christ's life may emerge in us. Nature teaches us this law: nothing rises to a higher life without first dying to a lower one.

Our Lord says, *“Unless you take up your cross daily and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple.”*

This, then, is the Mass. You are really assisting at Calvary.

I believe that when we go before the judgment seat of God, our greatest regret will be that we were not more faithful to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we have seen the importance of the Holy Mass in the life of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and we have learned more how to participate in the Mass from Ven. Fulton Sheen. There is nothing more important we do in life than worthily participate in the Holy Mass. Why? In the Mass, we are partaking in the sacrifice of Christ. Calvary is made present again on our altar, and all the graces of heaven are opened up to us. Let us always seek to grow in our devotion to our Eucharistic Lord, who promised to be with us to the end of the age (cf. Mt. 28:19-20). He is really, truly, and substantially present in the Eucharist. The same Jesus who walked on earth over two thousand years ago, is now present on the altar, and in us when we receive Holy Communion. His presence continues with the hosts left in the tabernacle. Let us seek to always grow in our devotion to our Lord in the Most Holy Eucharist. Let us consider the example of Mary, who by tradition would receive Jesus in Holy Communion from the apostle St. John.

What are some of the fruits of the Holy Mass? To see reality for what it is; to overcome vices; to grow in charity.

Why? Because the Mass is Calvary; the sacrifice of Love. In the Mass, we encounter the same Jesus Christ who now sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us, who came to earth to die, to rise to give us His life by grace.

So, if you are watching this on Holy Thursday (or perhaps Holy Wednesday evening), try to participate in the solemn liturgy of the **EVENING MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**. If on another day, try to get to Mass. Make the Mass the center of your life; live from the Mass.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit...

May God bless you.